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### Selecting Easy Care Clothes

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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# Selecting Easy Care Clothes

**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

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Clothes, by Bernetta Kahabka

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# Selecting Easy Care Clothes

Is easier care an important consideration in your clothes shopping? Do you want to use your time and energy for other things and keep laundering and clothes care time to a minimum?

The rise in costs of cleaning service requires easier clothing care. The use of leisure time for recreational activities and travel also demands clothing which requires less care. However, care does not stand alone in our conception of quality in clothing. Care is a part of the total picture of clothing which also includes appearance, comfort, durability, and economy. Each of us attaches different degrees of importance to these factors.

The "ease of care" factor will be more important to some people than to others. Its importance will also vary with the specific item of clothing. The slightly wrinkled look of freshly laundered lingerie, pajamas, or children's playclothes may be as acceptable to you as the smooth, pressed look of a dress, skirt, or a blouse.

Your available resources for care are *money, time, energy, home and commercial facilities for laundering and drycleaning, and storage space*. All of these will affect your clothing choices.

This fact sheet brings out the *easier care* factor from the whole picture of performance which means quality clothing to you and your family. It suggests characteristics of *fabric and garment construction* which contribute to easier care.

Easier care clothes may include one or more of the following:

- Stay fresh-looking longer—have a "built-in" neatness.
- Wash and dry quickly.
- Cleaning that does not require special handling or equipment.
- Retain shape—do not shrink or stretch.
- Retain pleats and creases.
- Stay smoother after laundering or dry-cleaning so that no ironing or only "touch-up" pressing is needed for a finished look.

## Type of Fabric

The fabric itself—its fiber content, finish, construction—may add or subtract to ease or care quality. Examine care in the following ways:

**Fabrics woven or knitted from yarns containing 100 per cent synthetic fibers.** Such fibers include nylon, the polyesters, and the acrylics. The general characteristics of these fibers are such that *they do not absorb moisture*.

- Soil is more easily removed because it stays on the surface or the fiber rather than penetrating into the fiber.
- Drying is quicker.
- Shape is maintained—no shrinking or stretching.

Therefore:

These synthetic fibers are affected by heat and can be heat set.

Therefore:

- Pleats and creases will tend to be relatively more durable through laundering and drycleaning processes.

## "BUILDING BLOCKS" OF CLOTHING



FIBER



YARN



WEAVE



FABRIC

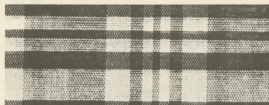


Figure 1. This is a 100% Dacron fabric. Soil does not penetrate.

Fabrics woven or knitted from yarns which are a blend of fibers including some of the synthetic fibers. To blend, different fibers are mixed together before the yarn is spun. A blend with a high proportion of synthetic fiber should have easier care qualities related to the general characteristics as stated above. Furthermore, individual synthetic fibers may have special properties to contribute to a blend.

- Polyesters (Dacron, Fortrel, Kodel, and Vycron) with their ability to resist wrinkles will contribute to wrinkle resistance of fabrics. Acrylics (Orlon, Sefran, Acrilan, Creslan) will contribute to shrink and stretch resistance or shape retention.

For example:

There are many fabric blends on the market today. The following are common blends which contribute to easier care:

- 65% polyester — 35% cotton
- 70% polyester — 30% rayon
- 50% polyester — 50% acrylic
- 65% polyester — 35% wool
- 70-80% polyester—30-20% rayon
- 70% acrylic — 30% wool
- 80% acrylic — 20% cotton
- 40-50% nylon—60-50% rayon

Ranges of five to ten percent of these fiber proportions are on the market and will also be satisfactory in relation to easier care.

Chemically finished fabrics in which the finish becomes a fixed or durable part of the fabric as a result of reaction with the fibers. Finishes may be used alone or in combinations on fabrics. One finish may also contribute more to a fabric than one easy care quality. The following finishes contribute to easier care:

- Wash-and-wear
- Wrinkle resistance
- Shrink resistance
- Stretch and sag resistance
- Soil resistance
- Spot and stain resistance
- Moth and mildew resistance
- Perspiration resistance

Fabrics which are surface treated or constructed to provide easier care qualities because they show wrinkles less or they recover readily from a wrinkled state.

- Textured surface fabrics produced by weaving or yarn twist (crepes, seersuckers)

For example:

These tend to show surface wrinkling less.

- Textured surface fabrics produced by chemical surface treatment (embossed, plisses)
- Fabric design patterning (prints, checks, plaids, stripes)

These tend to "hang out" from a wrinkled state.

- Fabric constructions permitting yarn movement (knits, woven stretch fabrics)

## Garment Construction

The way a garment is designed and constructed also affects care. Garment design and construction features which contribute to easier care are the following:

- Simple designs—less seaming—fewer seam lines.
- Bias cut seams tend to look and stay smoother.
- No top stitching—or at least a limited amount. Avoid "double-needle" or parallel line stitching.
- Smooth stitching—no puckering. If stitching is puckered when the garment is new it will most likely look more puckered after laundering.
- Generous seam allowances, finished, if necessary, to prevent fraying.
- Well finished buttonholes.
- Pleats which are pressed along the grain of the fabric rather than on the bias.
- A minimum of linings, interfacings, etc.
- A minimum of trim and frills.
- Interfacing attached to the facing edges to prevent curling or wrinkling.
- Hems with evenly distributed fullness.

**Remember:** The degree of importance you place on "easy care" performance in clothing will affect your choice of clothing. There are times when you may have to place a priority on one of these performance factors: **appearance, comfort, economy, durability, or easier care.**

These "built-in" care qualities often are more expensive to manufacture. Such fabrics or clothing may cost more on the market, but the care advantage may be well worth it to you.



Figure 2. The printed patterns in these fabrics may show wrinkles less than a plain fabric.

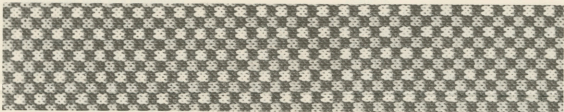


Figure 3. Firmly knit fabrics will tend to hang out from a wrinkled state.



Figure 4. This fabric has a surface treatment which camouflages wrinkles.

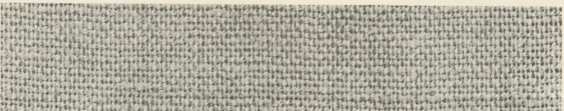


Figure 5. Stretch fabrics like this one permit movement of the yarn. Wrinkles are quickly restored to a smooth state of the fabric.

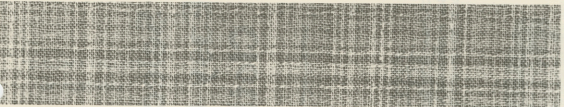


Figure 6. Crimped cotton yards in this plaid print contribute to wrinkle resistance.